1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

## CHAPTER VIII

## PROCURING OF OTHER FOOD AND DRINK

'Whatever came across them they must needs kill and eat it ;
They made no distinction. If they saw a jackal they killed
And ate it ; no distinction was observed ; they respected not antelope,
sambhar and the like.
They made no distinction in eating a sow, a quail, a pigeon,
A crow, a kite, an adjutant, a vulture,
A lizard, a frog, a beetle, a cow, a calf, a he- and a she-buffalo,
Rats, bandicoots, squirrels—all these they killed and ate.
So began the Gonds to do. They devoured raw and ripe things.'
(Hislop's version of the Lingo epic of the Gonds.)

### *A. Food Gathering*

FAMINE has never been a problem in Bastar, as the Marias and other tribes have always been able to draw half of their food supplies from the innumerable edible products of the vast forests. The difficulty is not so much to say what they collect and eat as what they do not ; in fact, if one were to take one of the lists of trees, shrubs and herbs compiled by the Central Provinces Forest Department, and copy from it the names of all edible forest products, one would not even then produce an exhaustive list. At page 124 above, many of the more important forest products collected and garnered were enumerated. *Mahua* (*Bassia latifolia*) is not common in the Abujhmar hills, where consequently little *mahua* spirit is distilled or drunk ; where it does occur, the Hill Marias collect its flowers and fruit as eagerly as cultivators throughout India. It is common in the Bison-horn country. The women and children gather the fallen flowers in the mornings. It is dried in the sun, and then stored in bamboo wicker baskets ; it keeps a long time. It is used to flavour *pej* and *guto*, or roasted. Oil is pressed in the plains from the fruit. Tamarind trees are not really wild, but were originally planted around village sites ; the fruit is carefully gathered from all the unoccupied village sites. The fruits of the *achar* (*Buchanania latifolia*) and *tendu* (*Diospyros melanoxylon*) are two of the main sources of food supply. They collect also fruit of the *seona* (*Gmelina arborea*), *jamun* (*Eugenia jambolana*) and *aonla* (*Phyllanthus emblica*). Wild mangoes are common, and they are learning to cultivate the tree ; they store whole fruit, dried pulp, and kernels whole or crushed. In the south of the State the toddy palm (*Borassus flabelliformis*) is the mainstay of the economic life of the people, but

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it is not much used among Bison-horn and Hill Marias in comparison to the *salphi* or sago palm (*Caryota urens*; Maria, *garga marra*) which is found wild and is extensively propagated. When the *salphi*, after much cutting of the spadix for the intoxicating sap, ceases to flower, the interior of the stem yields a fibrous pith. This the Hill Maria women (probably the Bison-horn also) pound on a large flat stone with a heavy oval pebble held in their right hand, to separate pith from fibre. The resultant pith 'grain' looks like lime, and is steamed into cakes; an earthenware pot has a little water poured into it, and over the water bamboo sticks are criss-crossed and covered with *siari* leaves as a platform for the pith to be steamed; no salt or sugar is added.

Actually most of the fruit already mentioned is collected by women and children; the men, of course, deal with the toddy and sago palm sap, and their methods will be described in the section on drinking and intoxicants. The men collect those forest products which they need for basketry or rope making, or in finding which there is an element of the chase. They like to roam about with their bows and arrows while their women are busy gathering fruit.

The women gather also various leaves, flowers and seeds as vegetables. They use the young green leaves and the seeds of the sal (*Shorea robusta*); the flowers of the *giril marra* shrub (*Indigofera arborea*); the young curled fronds of bracken in the Abujhmar hills, possibly also on the Bailadila mountains, where, too, it is common (the Hill Marias call it *handa jabba* and the Bison-horn *anda koser*); the seeds of the marking nut tree (*Semecarpus anacardium*; *bhelwa*); the young green shoots, pith and seeds of the bamboo; the fruits of the *ber* (*Zizyphus jujuba*). The digging of forest roots and yams in the rains is one of the women's chief occupations; there are many varieties, and some are now cultivated. In the early rains a much sought after foods are the *khudrati* or *bora* fungus, and the mushroom. Various wild plants are gathered as vegetables from marsh and river valley, especially the *chiur*, the long thin leaves of which are like small hyacinth leaves, and are a favourite food of wild buffalo and bison. Women and men collect large supplies of *siari* or elephant creeper leaves for use as plates and drinking vessels. *Aki* is the Gondi word for a leaf, and the assonance *aking-waking* is commonly used as covering all produce which the Maria collects from the forest.

In August and September the Bison-horn Maria women spend hours swishing a basket[1] over the tops of certain wild grasses in the fields to collect the seeds, which are eaten like the small hill grains.

[1] Hill Maria women also do this, using little wicker-work shields fastened to bamboo sticks to beat the grass seeds into a basket.

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A little later they collect *kapani*, the wild bearded rice common in all old rice fields and fallows and at the edges of standing water, by holding a winnowing-fan in one hand and beating the grain of the standing ripe plants into it with the other; the bearded ears are sometimes plaited into '*sela*' fringes for ornamenting doors of houses at the new-eating festivals.

The men are adept in collecting the honey of various kinds of bees, though sometimes, despite forest rules, too prone to save trouble by felling rather than climbing a fine tree. For this purpose, and for tapping palm trees, they often fasten to the trunks of trees long thick bamboos, cutting the side shoots down to stumps four or five inches long to serve as ladder rungs. Gums are collected from many species of trees, for use as bird-lime or in securing the *kosa* silk whipping of arrow-heads, etc. In Dantewara and Bijapur tahsils the Forest Department has quantities of *tasar* silk cocoons collected by Bison-horn Maria men when, in the rains in the intervals between sowing and reaping their various crops, they go out to the forests in search of such delicacies as red ants' nests, ant-eaters, rats, squirrels and grubs. The cocoons are high on sal or *saja* trees; where the climbers cannot reach them they use long bamboo poles with a piece of bamboo fastened at an acute angle at the end to serve as a hook. They get about Rs. 3 a thousand cocoons from the Koshta weavers who employ them; the Hill Maria, however, generally collects only what cocoons he needs for his own purposes. Red ants' nests are cooked, leaves, ants and all, either with *pej* or *gato*, or by themselves and eaten with pulses as a vegetable. They are also a favourite febrifuge; a rough and ready remedy is to shake out the live red ants on to the patient's skull, when the formic acid of their stings is said to reduce the fever; the more elaborate method is to boil the nest, ants and all, and to strain off and use the juice as a febrifuge in small doses; this juice is said to taste sharper than any lime and believed to be invaluable for a long-standing fever. In collecting the palms of the dwarf palms *chhind* (*Phoenix sylvestris*), *P. acaulis*, and *buta chhind* (*P. farinifera*) for use for thatching, basketry or making rough cords for binding fences, the men not only collect the small dates or the flowers (according to season) and the edible pith of the *buta chhind*, but also the fat white grub of a certain beetle, which is also found in the stems of the toddy palm and in fresh green monsoon bamboo shoots. This is eaten fried in ghee or oil with a little spice and chillies, and is regarded as a great delicacy; it is sold in the Jagdalpur market for three or four pice, and even high-caste Hindus buy it. When white ants emerge in flying swarms early in the monsoon they collect them after they have shed their wings, or pull the wings

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off, and eat them raw. The men gather the edible bean-pods of the *siari* (*Bauhinia vahlii*) creeper when cutting its stems for rope fibre and gathering its leaves for plates, rain hats and shields, but generally light a fire then and there in the forest and roast the beans in the pods, when it is easy to extract them to eat.

### *B. Hunting and Trapping*

The Hill Maria is as omnivorous as all Gonds, and it is difficult to discover what he will not eat if he can get it. But there is little game left in the Abujhmar hills, except where the hills descend to the Indrawati, Gudra and Kotri valleys. The *shikaris par excellence* of Bastar are the Murias of the northern plateaux and the Bison-horn Marias of the *parganas* around Barsur and the Indrawati valley, where there is still fairly plentiful game. The Hill Maria is therefore not an expert beater, though twenty-four hours spent by any would-be sportsman in Kutru territory in training Hill Marias to beat will be amply rewarded, not only by the quick way in which they learn, even if taught only by pantomime, but by the fun and humour with which they will take their lesson. They have memories of hunting tiger, panther, bison, buffalo, deer of all kinds, and even, very shadowy, of rhinoceros.[1] But the appearance in the hills of one or two tiger after the 1931 census for the first time within human memory was interpreted as a sign of divine displeasure, and all the census house numbers painted by the enumerators on little squares of wood prepared *ad hoc* by the Marias and preserved in many houses for each census from 1911 onwards were collected together and burnt on the village boundaries to placate the Departed. Outside Tondawada village a panther was shot by the village lads with arrows thirty years or more ago; three small stone menhirs about twenty inches high were driven then into the ground at the spots where its head, the root and the tip of its tail had lain when it fell dead; the feat is still spoken of as a deed of prowess. Orcha is the only Hill Maria village, so far as I am aware, that follows the practice of the spring hunt before sowing the crops, which is so marked and important a feature of tribal life among the Bison-horn Marias, the Parjas and Bhattras; but the Orcha people seem to have copied the hunt from the Bison-horn Marias without its religious significance; there is no sprinkling of blood on the first seeds sown, no ceremony before and after the hunt, women take no part in the proceedings to drive unwilling men out to the hunt, and no portion of the slain quarry is offered to the clan-god, the

Hill Marias

[1] Compare *Gazetteer*, p. 32. The rhinoceros tradition still existed in 1928.

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
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Plate XI

The fermented sap of the toago-palm is a favourite drink

[p. 44 (2)]

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
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substantial and carefully tended buildings. Fowls, set in funnel-shaped bamboo stands, share the house with the human beings.

II

The Maria's main source of livelihood is agriculture. The ancient and traditional method is axe-cultivation, whereby the people make clearings in the forest with their axes, allow the felled wood to dry, fire it shortly before the rains and then sow the seed in the ashes. Sometimes this is done in the very place where the trees are cut. Sometimes brushwood is carried to a regular field and spread upon its surface. The Maria, living as they do in settled and often level country, have also many permanent fields which are embanked and irrigated by artificial tanks. The Maria are very proud of these tanks, and they are a frequent cause of dispute which sometimes leads to murder. A great part of the Maria's life is necessarily spent in these fields and clearings, and little field-huts and platforms are erected in which whole families camp for weeks at a time watching the crops at night and cooking and doing their work by day. Everybody helps in the work. Beside the family there may be farm-hands, some of a special kind such as the Lamhada, who serves for his wife instead of paying the bride-price, and the Kabari who is a bond-servant working to repay a loan.[1]

Besides agriculture, the Maria eagerly and successfully exploit the produce of the great forests in which they live. There is nothing edible that they will not eat, fruits, roots, tubers, leaves—they have a profound knowledge of the possibilities of natural produce. They are equally omnivorous in their attitude to meat. In the villages they keep pigs, goats and fowls, and they are fond of pigeons. They still (though they often deny it to outsiders) eat beef on all important and ceremonial occasions. Rats, squirrels and small birds are caught by the children and roasted and eaten with delight.

[1] The Kabari system, which is similar to what is called Bhagela in Hyderabad, Kamiauti in Bihar, and Gothi in Orissa and Madras, is open to grave abuses—men working a whole life-time to settle a debt which is not settled even by death, but descends to the sons—and is now controlled by the State.

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

## THE MURIA'S LIVELIHOOD

Their interest in these household occupations may be seen in scores of homely riddles, which describe them in vivid symbol. 883

> Drumming, drumming, what is that drum?
> At cock-crow she is drumming.

A motiari is expected to be back from the ghotul by dawn and should be busy husking grain before her parents are awake.

A broom is 'the thing that licks quickly and then falls flat'; a leaf-plate is 'the little tank full of thorns' or 'the boy that morning and evening gives a share to all'; a pot of curds hawked round the village is described as 'the white cock going from house to house'.

But the main interest of chelik and motiari—for after all they are still only boys and girls—is in food. *'Bhaio bihān handiya ma dhyān.* As soon as morning comes, his mind is in the cooking-pot.' Of things to eat the Muria have a considerable variety, much more than would be available to people of similar economic status in a town. All the rich and varied produce of the great Bastar jungles is open to them; the State has not yet interfered with their right to natural roots, fruit and leaves—they may take what they want so long as they do no damage. 262

As Grigson says of the Maria: 'The difficulty is not so much to say what they collect and eat as what they do not; in fact, if one were to take one of the lists of trees, shrubs and herbs compiled by the Central Provinces Forest Department and copy from it the names of all edible forest products, one would not even then produce an exhaustive list.'[1] I do not propose to give such a list here; but I will briefly mention the things that chelik and motiari like best. Meat and fish probably stand first in popularity—I will describe them later.

FIG. 5. Unpal rice husker. Length 5'8"

Among fruit trees, the mahua is supreme. When the flowers begin to fall, the cattle are kept tied up until the women and children have gathered them. They spread them in bright yellow patches swiftly turning brown on rocks, before their houses, in specially-made enclosures. When dry enough, the flowers are beaten with heavy sticks, sometimes with the wooden doors of a pigsty. The pulp is made into chutney with dried khamer fruit and tamarind kernels, and eaten with rice or gruel. The oil is used for cooking and lighting. The flowers are stored in baskets, and make one of the most eagerly demanded gifts when the chelik make a dance tour of a village. 262 252 222 [373] 262 222 [563]

Another popular fruit is, of course, the mango. The motiari fetch baskets of wild mangoes from the forest where the trees grow in profusion, cut them up in the ghotul and give them with chilli and salt to the chelik.

Acura fruit is liked, and there are many riddles about it. 'A green pigeon came from Porrobbum and laid its eggs on a leaf.' 'The white bird hides its eggs under its wings.' Other popular fruits are those of the thorny bhoir—'Mother bites, but daughter invites'; the kurin—'The little sparrow's liver is sweet'; the sinna, the char, the jamun and the tamarind. Tendu fruit is picked while still unripe and put in kodon chaff to mature. Sometimes it is buried in the ground and a fire is lit above it. When ripe, it is eaten raw. Wild figs are eaten ripe or dried and ground up with flour. [524] [251]

[1] Grigson, op. cit., p. 151.

## THE MURIA AND THEIR GHOTUL

262 The children, as well as older people, kill and eat frogs when they can. In
● 222 the rains they creep up to any small pond and with their sticks kill the frogs
252 before they are able to escape into the water. They remove the skin and
stomach and roast the rest. Many people, however, only eat the hind legs,
[278] regarding the rest as dangerous. Frog's flesh is believed to be a useful remedy for swollen glands.[1] Various kinds of lizards are eaten the same way. In most of the less sophisticated villages red ants are valued both for food and as a febrifuge. A party of chelik go through the forest until they see the ants' nests high up in the branches of a tree. Then one of them climbs up and breaks off or cuts all the branches on which the nests are and throws them to the ground. The others quickly prepare leaf-cups and one of them plunges his hands into the nests and fills the cups with the ants and their eggs. They brush off the eggs and tie up the ants in the cups. They bring the little bundles home and put them straight into the fire. When they have been roasted for some minutes they remove the cups, open them and squeeze the ants into a paste. They add salt and chilli and put the mixture back into the fire to bake. This chutney, which is very tasty, with a sharp clean taste, is generally eaten with liquor. At the beginning of the rains the Muria also catch the flying white ants, pull off their wings and fry the bodies.[2]

Other delicacies are the grubs which are found in the date-palm. These large white grubs are sought after by many others beside the Muria, and are bought even by high-caste Hindus in the bazaars for as much as two pice apiece. They are fried and eaten and sometimes oil is extracted from them.

762 The Muria also enjoy catching and eating the river crab, 'the blacksmith
226 that takes his pincers and hammer about with him', 'the Raja who has hands
524 and feet but lacks a head'.[3] Shrimps and prawns are common in the streams; a prawn is described as 'the boy with eight feet, twelve shoulders and sixteen horns'.

262 Most of these delicacies, fried with a little chilli, are used as 'savouries'
when the people go to drink salphi juice or other liquor. Men and boys going in the evening towards the sago-palms may be seen carrying little leaf-bundles containing fried frogs, grubs and a chutney of red ants. These relieve the sweetness of the salphi juice and the unpleasant taste of the mahua spirit.

262 Beef is still eaten in all parts of Bastar, even by the sophisticated Raja
843 Muria who are so loud in their protests that they have abandoned it. An interesting story connects the practice with the *dohada* cravings of pregnancy. The Muria theory, which is the old Hindu theory, is that it is the child in the womb who is responsible for the mother's irrational desires. 'A Brahmin woman six months pregnant had a craving for beef and went to a Ganda to get some. For fear of the husband he refused, but his wife gave her two

[171] [1] Crooke has an interesting note on frog-eating. The Musahar of Mirzapur, he says, eat two kinds, a small and a large, at marriages. 'The Burmese certainly eat them and boiled frogs are said to be exposed for sale in their bazaars. I hear that the Burmese prisoners in the Benares jail have been caught eating them alive. Mr Bower tells me that he knows of Saiwa in Oudh fattening frogs for food in earthen jars.'—*N.I. Notes and Queries*, Vol. II, p. 78.

[171] [2] In South India ants are believed to be a tonic; there is a Tamil proverb that 'If you eat a thousand ants, you will get the strength of an elephant'. A paste made with ants is recorded as being used with curry in Kanara. Winged termites are widely eaten, and sometimes their bodies are sun-dried and stored. The queen termite is considered a special delicacy, fried or raw; Tamil athletes are said to keep themselves in trim by swallowing it raw and then sprinting a couple of miles. See S. T. Moses, 'Ants and Folk-Beliefs in South India', *Man in India*, Vol. VIII, pp. 10ff.

[278] [3] The viscous substance adhering to the carapace of a crab is believed to be good for ear-ache.

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria



with wood and fired; pots are placed in rows upon them. The motiari husk and clean the rice, and make the leaf-cups and plates, but the boys do the actual cooking. When the rice is ready it is tipped out in a great pile on bamboo mats. A pig, which is killed by being beaten on the head with a rice husker, is roasted in the fire till its hair is burnt off; it is skinned and cleaned. Flesh, bones and skin are cut up into little squares of equal size—an important matter, for it is essential that everyone should receive exactly the same amount. These pieces are fried in mahua oil, and put into large earthen pots with rice-water, salt, haldi and chilli and boiled till ready. Fish is prepared in much the same way, except that usually something sour is added to flavour it. Fowls are cooked in leaf-cups. The intestines are squeezed out, and the whole chicken with head and feet is roasted with a little salt. Eggs are wrapped in leaves and baked in the fire. Mongoose flesh is roasted and spiced with dried mangoes. Crocodile is boiled.

At the ghotul feasts and marriages I have attended everyone sits round in a big circle, and the boys (sometimes assisted by a few motiari) serve the food. The bits of meat are carefully counted out into leaf-cups and distributed. Rice is served from baskets or winnowing-fans direct onto leaf-plates.

At home, the family sits round the pot of jawa, which is taken straight off the fire and placed in the middle of the floor. Each has a little chutney on a leaf in front of him and an empty leaf-cup. The mother dips a gourd into the pot and helps the little children; then each member of the family helps himself. There is no idea that men should eat before women or elders before the children.

Doctors say that the Muria's food lacks fat and protein and criticize them for not taking more milk, ghee and vegetable. No doubt the Muria, like other people, would eat more of these things if they could get them. But there is no doubt that they do not like milk, and rarely take it themselves or give it to their children.

Famine is not common in Bastar, for the people can fall back on the almost limitless products of the forests. But it has been known, and a sombre song preserves its memory.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Nimāre weke dāntona rawnāni* | Vulture, whither away, vulture? |
| *Dori bhumi dāntona dāda le* | I am going towards the west, brother, |
| *Bhumi dukār dukār roy dāda le* | For the day of want has dawned. |
| *Bhumi te dukār arit roy dāda le* | The famine is over all the world |
| *Hikāt huro bhaiso roy dāda le* | Black, black are the buffaloes, |
| *Sarpane bhaiso arit roy dāda le* | And all of them have died, brother. |
| *Podor pungār doyo roy dāda le* | White as cotton flowers are the cows, |
| *Sarpane doyo artu roy dāda le* | And all of them have fallen in summer. |
| *Puhle dhelāt rawnāl roy dāda le* | On the broken clod the vulture, |
| *Wetle marāte kawrāl roy dāda le* | On the withered tree the crow, |
| *Kawar woher inta roy dāda le* | The crow is cawing, brother. |
| *Raiyaha reyon kawrāl roy dāda le* | It is ready to fly down. |

## VI. Honey

Honey was discovered by a Maria named Waddai who also gave his name to the whole succession of Waddai diviners. 'Waddai went one day to a medium, with a gift of char nuts, seeking help for his sick son. On the way he met a monkey which had been outcasted for falling while jumping from a tree and

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
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had to give a penalty feast to its tribe. It had everything ready save char nuts. When it heard where Waddai was going, it promised to cure his son if he would give it the nuts. The monkey went to the house, pretended to fall into a trance, shaking its head and body, and the boy at once recovered. The monkey told Waddai that he should always cure disease in this way.

'The sun had now set and Waddai went half-way with the monkey to see it home. It was very pleased with the nuts and took Waddai to a honey-comb, drove away the bees and gave the sweet juice and wax to him. Since that day, we have eaten honey and as Waddai took the first honey at night, we take it then also.'

The Muria distinguish four kinds of bees: the *bāgh ondār*, which live on big trees; the *satāru ondār*; the small *kitka ondār* and the *lokti ondār* or *mas*.[1] It is said that the hives of the *bāgh* and *satāru ondār* are discovered when they go according to their habit to get water from a trickling stream. Men go along the stream until they notice bees coming and going and then try to follow them home. The *lokti* are easier to find because they sit buzzing outside their hole, and the honey-gatherer is attracted to the place by the noise. Muria observation is shown by this account: 'All the swarm seek flowers and suck their sweet juice. As the bees sit on the flowers gum sticks to their feet. With this they build their hive, and put the juice inside. They build so well that not a drop leaks out.'

'Only a brave man will go for honey', say the Muria. When they have located a hive, two or three men go together; for the *bāgh ondār* (which are blind in the dark) they go at night. They tie grass at the end of a pole, light it and smoke out the bees. Then they place a bamboo ladder against the tree and climb up, though sometimes they cut the tree down to save themselves trouble, and collect the honey in hollow bamboo tubes.

The honey is eaten with wheat-cakes or mixed with flour and made into a sweet bread which is greatly liked by children.

Sometimes if the honey-gatherer is unsuccessful in finding a hive, he engages the Siraha or Gunia who searches for it with the help of the winnowing-fan or bits of grass. When he climbs the tree to get the honey, he calls upon the Dead to assist him.

Should a swarm make their hive in or near a house, it is considered very lucky.[2]

The Muria's interest in honey-gathering is indicated by the number of riddles about it.[3]

[1] Compare Thurston on the Kond: 'The Khonds recognize four different kinds of bees, known by the following Oriya names: (*a*) *bhaga mohu*, a large-sized bee (*Apis dorsata*); (*b*) *sattapuri mohu*, building its comb in seven layers (*Apis indica*); (*c*) *binchina mohu*, with a comb like a fan; (*d*) *nikiti mohu*, a very small bee.'—Thurston, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 363. I have found similar classifications among the Juang and Gadaba.

[2] 'It is considered very lucky if bees or white ants take up their abode in an empty house or at the gate of the city.'—*N.I. Notes and Queries*, Vol. V (1895), p. 52. See also ibid., p. 90. Many Naga actually hang the combs of bees or wasps in front of their houses, perhaps to frighten away wild cats: the Sema say they help to hatch hen's eggs; the Thado Kuki say they ward off evil spirits. Hutton recalls similar beliefs in the Andamans and Malaya, and adds 'I am disposed to suspect the survival of a definitely Negrito belief in the practice of hanging the combs of bees or wasps in the entrance of houses'.—J. H. Hutton, *Diaries of Two Tours in the Unadministered Area east of the Naga Hills* (Calcutta, 1919), p. 6.

[3] A Kharia riddle about the honeycomb: 'In a golden box bells are sounding: when you open it, you get sweet bread.'—S. C. Roy, *The Kharias* (Ranchi, 1937), Vol. II, p. 430.